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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL PURSUANT TO SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1216 (1998) RELATIVE TO THE SITUATION IN GUINEA-BISSAU

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 12 of Security Council resolution 1216 (1998) of 21 December 1998, by which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed of the situation in Guinea-Bissau and to submit a report to it by 17 March 1999 on the implementation of the Abuja Agreement (S/1998/1028, annex), including the implementation by the interposition force of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) of its mandate.

2. The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Kieran Prendergast, briefed the Council on the overall situation in Guinea-Bissau on 4 February 1999. The present report focuses on the Council's specific request for information on the implementation of the Abuja Agreement, which seeks to restore peace to Guinea-Bissau.

II. THE ABUJA AGREEMENT

3. Under the terms of the Abuja Agreement signed at Abuja, on 1 November 1998, the parties to the conflict in Guinea-Bissau, namely the Government of President João Bernardo Vieira and the self-proclaimed military junta in that country agreed:

(a) To reaffirm the cease-fire agreement signed in Praia on 26 August 1998;

(b) To the total withdrawal from Guinea-Bissau of all foreign troops, to be accomplished simultaneously with the deployment of the ECOMOG interposition force, which was to take over from the withdrawn forces;

(c) That the ECOMOG interposition force would guarantee security along the Guinea-Bissau/Senegal border, keep the warring parties apart and guarantee free access to humanitarian organizations and agencies to reach the affected

civilian population; the Oswaldo Vieira international airport and the seaport were to be opened with immediate effect;

(d) To immediately put in place a government of national unity, which would include, among others, representatives of the self-proclaimed junta, in line with the agreement already reached between the parties;

(e) To hold general and presidential elections not later than the end of March 1999; those elections would be observed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and the international community.

4. The Abuja Agreement was the first formal framework to which the leaders of the ex-belligerent forces, President Vieira and General Ansumane Mane, personally committed themselves. It was witnessed and signed by ECOWAS leaders as well as by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ibrahima Fall. The signing of the agreement was seen as a demonstration of the readiness of both sides to begin working together towards returning the country to peace and normalcy.

5. In order to carry out the effective and timely implementation of the Abuja Agreement, ECOWAS asked the international community for logistical and other material support. At a meeting with me, on 11 December 1998, an ECOWAS ministerial delegation on the Guinea-Bissau issues reiterated that ECOWAS needed logistical and financial support in order to proceed with the speedy deployment of the ECOMOG interposition force, the key operational support instrument for the implementation of the Agreement on the ground. The delegation emphasized the importance of United Nations/ECOWAS collaboration and asked me to appoint a representative in that country.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ABUJA AGREEMENT

A. Political aspects

Installation of the Government of National Unity

6. Following agreement between President Vieira and General Mane, on 3 December 1998, Francisco Fadul was appointed Prime Minister to lead the new transitional Government of National Unity called for under the Agreement. To address issues related to the structure and the composition of that Government, President Vieira and General Mane met, at the invitation of President Gnassingbe Eyadema, the current Chairman of ECOWAS, in Lomé, and on 15 December 1998 signed an Additional Protocol to the Abuja Agreement on this matter.

7. Subsequently, on 8 January 1999, in conformity with the formula outlined in the Additional Protocol of 15 December, members of the transitional Government of National Unity were appointed. Five ministers (including the Foreign Minister) as well as three secretaries of State were nominated to that Government by President Vieira, while three ministers (including the Ministers of Defence and Internal Administration) and four secretaries of State were

nominated by the self-proclaimed junta. Despite the announcement that the new Government would be sworn in on 22 January, Prime Minister Fadul was reported to have stated that the Government would begin functioning only after foreign troops invited by President Vieira had left Guinea-Bissau. The resumption of fighting on 31 January further delayed the installation of the Government.

8. Immediately following renewed fighting, President Eyadema launched intensive efforts to secure a cease-fire and dispatched two envoys to Bissau with a draft cease-fire agreement, which President Vieira and General Mane signed on 3 February. On 17 February, both leaders met with President Eyadema in Lomé and agreed to re-energize the implementation of the Abuja accords. To that end, President Vieira and General Mane undertook formally, as reflected in the final communiqué issued following their meeting, never again to resort to arms and agreed that the Government of National Unity should be inaugurated as soon as possible.

9. Subsequently, on 20 February, the Government of National Unity was formally inaugurated in Bissau at a ceremony chaired by President Vieira in the presence of General Mane and attended also by senior Guinea-Bissau and foreign officials, including the Prime Minister of Togo, who represented President Eyadema.

10. The swearing in of the new Government of National Unity constituted a significant step forward in the peace process. However, the effective functioning of the Government has been hampered by a number of obstacles, including the lack of adequate facilities and staff and other resources, since the fighting destroyed many government buildings and installations and caused civil servants and other professional cadres to seek refuge in other countries. The disruption of the country's economic and monetary system and the lack of operational funds, in addition to the considerable level of mistrust between the two sides, have also hindered the work of the new, specially constituted Government, as it seeks to function cohesively as a team.

B. Military and security aspects

The deployment of ECOMOG and the withdrawal of foreign forces

11. Despite enormous logistical, financial and other difficulties, an advance ECOMOG contingent of 110 Togolese troops was deployed in Guinea-Bissau between 26 December 1998 and 2 January 1999. A further contingent of 300 troops was deployed on 4 February. Currently, the ECOMOG interposition force in Guinea-Bissau stands at 600 troops, composed of contingents from Benin, the Gambia, the Niger and Togo. Mali has recently announced its intention to send a contingent of 125 soldiers.

12. With the arrival of ECOMOG forces, foreign troops began to withdraw, with their departure expected to be completed in the coming days.

13. ECOMOG has established its operational and command headquarters at Bissau, from where its troops are dispatched for operations in other parts of the country. Owing to the lack of adequate communications equipment, troops operating in other parts of the country generally return on the same day to

Bissau to reduce the risk of being cut off from contact with the force headquarters. To enhance its patrol and reconnaissance activities in Bissau and elsewhere in the country, ECOMOG has indicated a need, in particular, for four-wheel drive vehicles, International Maritime Satellite Organization and mobile radio communication equipment.

14. As called for under the Abuja Agreement, ECOMOG forces are providing security at the sea port, which has reopened, and at the international airport, which has reopened for humanitarian flights, but not yet to commercial traffic. The forces also provide security for the President and the Prime Minister and escort representatives of the two sides to meetings and other functions, especially in Bissau. Furthermore, with some 100,000 people displaced throughout the country, ECOMOG helps ensure access for humanitarian agencies to reach the affected populations.

15. The deployment of ECOMOG along the Guinea-Bissau/Senegal border has yet to begin. ECOMOG has indicated that this task, specifically called for under the Abuja accords, will require more troops. Divergent views have emerged among authorities in Guinea-Bissau regarding this issue. The President and his supporters advocate the need for additional troops, while the Prime Minister and representatives of the junta have expressed the opinion that enough progress has been made in the peace process to make the arrival of more troops unnecessary.

16. Following agreement between President Vieira and General Mane in Lomé on 17 February, in which they "reiterated the need for the parties to the conflict to begin the disarmament and encampment of troops", ECOMOG has begun the task of disarming the forces of the two ex-belligerents. In order to coordinate the disarmament process, a special commission, including representatives of ECOMOG and of forces loyal to President Vieira and of the self-appointed military junta, has been established in Bissau. ECOMOG reports that it has recovered all heavy weapons country-wide and that these arms are now under its custody, stored in depots in different locations and guarded by ECOMOG troops. ECOMOG further reports that the collection of small weapons and light arms has also been concluded in the capital and is being extended to other locations. The weapons are stored in containers, with the three parties represented in the joint commission each having a key. It is widely acknowledged that the gathering of small and light weapons is likely to be more challenging, as the country is reported to be awash in weapons.

17. ECOMOG has also launched a demining programme in collaboration with the two former warring parties. As a first step, based on information provided by the two sides, it has started to demarcate and mark the mined areas. Further action in the demining of identified mine sites would require appropriate equipment, other resources and expertise, which are currently lacking.

18. An agreement between ECOWAS and Guinea-Bissau defining the operations, composition and status of ECOMOG on the territory of Guinea-Bissau is expected to be signed shortly by the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, Lansana Kouyaté, and representatives of President Vieira and the self-proclaimed military junta.

19. Pursuant to paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution 1216 (1998), a report by ECOWAS on the deployment and operation of ECOMOG is under preparation and will be forwarded to the Council as soon as it is received.

C. Electoral aspects

20. As indicated in paragraph 3 (e) above, the Abuja Agreement calls for the holding of elections "not later than the end of March 1999". It is now clear that it will be impossible to meet that deadline, owing largely to accumulated delays in the implementation of the peace accords. However, it is important for the successful conclusion of the peace process that this crucial task be rescheduled.

21. The rescheduling of elections is also important in view of the signs of constitutional uncertainty emerging around varying interpretations of the duration of the respective terms of office of the President of the Republic and of the National Assembly. According to the Constitution, the National Assembly's mandate should have expired in July 1998, a period that coincided with the military uprising in the country. In November 1998, the Assembly met and passed a bill to extend its own mandate, a procedure provided for in the Constitution. However, the act was never promulgated by the President, as required, though he did not formally veto it. On the other hand, the President's term is due to expire on 29 September 1999. An election held after that date may introduce a problem as to the extension of his mandate. This is an issue that needs to be addressed in a spirit of openness, compromise and good will.

22. The various parties concerned in Guinea-Bissau, including representatives of the two signatories to the Abuja Agreement, have expressed to recent United Nations missions, including a mission from the Department of Political Affairs to Guinea-Bissau from 6 to 13 March 1999, their firm interest to have elections held as soon as possible. However, there are different points of view as to when the elections should be held. Critical factors that have been cited in arguments for and against prospective dates include the onset of the rainy season by July/August, the desirability of ensuring the resettlement of internally displaced persons as well as the return of refugees (including, in particular, civil servants), the departure of foreign troops, the reunification/reorganization of the armed forces, the completion of disarmament and demilitarization, and the demobilization and resettlement of surplus military personnel.

23. Both President Vieira and Prime Minister Fadul have recently written to me to request United Nations assistance for the presidential and legislative elections. Specifically, they have requested the coordination of all international community assistance, the provision of technical assistance to the electoral authorities, and the coordination of international observation of the polls. As a first step towards considering possible United Nations support, provision for an electoral officer has been included in the United Nations Peace-building Support Office to be set up in Bissau. Furthermore, there are ongoing arrangements between the office of the Focal Point for Electoral Affairs

in the Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme to determine the exact needs that should be met through technical assistance.

IV. THE PEACE-BUILDING SUPPORT OFFICE

24. On 3 March 1999, the Security Council approved my proposal to establish a United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) to be headed by a Representative of the Secretary-General (S/1999/233). Subsequently, a small mission from the Department of Political Affairs visited Bissau from 8 to 11 March 1999. The purpose of the mission was to assess the situation on the ground and to determine the logistical and other requirements for the establishment and operation of the new office. All the political actors welcomed the decision to appoint a Representative of the Secretary-General. I shall shortly inform the Council of the name of the person who will be my Representative in Guinea-Bissau. I have instructed the Department of Political Affairs and other concerned units in the Secretariat to do their utmost to ensure the earliest possible deployment of UNOGBIS.

25. You will recall that one of the primary functions of UNOGBIS in the post-conflict environment in which it will operate is "to provide the political framework and leadership for harmonizing and integrating the activities of the United Nations system in the country, particularly during the transitional period leading up to general and presidential elections" (see S/1999/232). In this connection, I intend to write to all heads of agencies, programmes, offices and funds of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, requesting them to lend their support to UNOGBIS and to my Representative. Without this support, the holistic response to post-conflict situations which I had advocated in my report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (S/1998/318), cannot be achieved. In pursuit of this integrated approach, the official serving as the United Nations Resident Coordinator will also act as Deputy to the Representative of the Secretary-General.

26. Another principal function of UNOGBIS is to facilitate, in close cooperation with the parties concerned, the implementation of the Abuja Agreement. In order to ensure that this task is performed effectively, my Representative will work with regional States, ECOWAS, and other actors inside and outside the region.

V. OBSERVATIONS

27. The post-conflict situation in Guinea-Bissau remains very fragile. The economy, basic social services and state institutions all need to be rebuilt virtually from scratch. The people of Guinea-Bissau need a durable peace to attend to their shattered livelihoods.

28. I therefore strongly hope that the parties will translate into concrete measures the commitments they undertook under the Abuja Agreement. The significant actions they have taken, so far, towards the implementation of that Agreement are steps in the right direction. In this regard, I wish to commend

the efforts both of the regional leaders and of civil society inside Guinea-Bissau for their unstinting support during and after the crisis. I should like, in particular, to commend President Eyadema, the current Chairman of ECOWAS, for his timely actions and his leadership, which have made it possible for the parties to resolve their differences peacefully and work together in a spirit of national reconciliation. I am heartened by the undertaking made by President Vieira and General Mane, in the presence of the ECOWAS Chairman, never to resort to arms again. I trust that the same spirit of compromise will guide their steps as they attempt to reconcile their differing views on the date of the next general and presidential elections. The United Nations stands ready to support their efforts. I am confident that the "Group of Friends of Guinea-Bissau", recently established in New York under the Chairmanship of the Gambia, will do the same.

29. The dedication, courage and professionalism shown by ECOMOG troops in the discharge of their mandate under the Abuja Agreement deserve special mention. I should like to express my appreciation to those Member States that have made possible the deployment of ECOMOG to Guinea-Bissau, and I encourage them and other Member States to make timely contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund set up last month to support ECOMOG.